

F-17 Creating better schools: Australian experiences in building partnerships with school communities

D T Gamage

Faculty of Education University of Newcastle, Callaghan, Australia

In the 1990s, building partnerships by schools with local communities have become a world-wide trend. This is revealed in studies of community participation in school governance in national systems from New Zealand to Canada and USA.

The research on effective schools of the 1970s identified parental participation and school leadership as key factors in motivating both teachers and students in teaching and learning. In Australia, even before the effective schools movement of the mid-1970s, parental groups pressed school systems to experiment with a higher degree of community participation in education. It is ironic to note that in 1966 when Coleman's Report in USA concluded that *"school makes no difference in child's learning"*, parents in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) believed that community participation will lead to better schools which in fact would make that difference. Thus, the first public seminar held in Canberra in November 1966 became a catalyst for some Australian systems such as the ACT and Victoria to refine and improve their school governance with community participation. This paper examines over 20 years of this experience with an emphasis on its impact based on perceptions of the key stakeholders.

The data presented was drawn from 2 research projects which included 113 interviews in 17 Victorian and 8 ACT schools and subsequent follow up studies. The research suggests that principals and the representatives of teachers, parents, students and community were happy with the partnerships perceiving that it had enabled them to create better schools.